

God is essentially Light, and He has called us, as the Apostle says, unto His admirable light, and as heart knows no repose until it rests in God, so our spiritual eye will suffer until it feasts upon the brightness of God's holy countenance. When the light of this life is extinct, then especially the soul yearns for the sight of God, with a yearning unknown to this life. The suffering from this unsatisfied craving of the soul to behold God, the suffering by the holy soul from this temporary spiritual darkness is greater than all the other sufferings of Purgatory combined.

With reference to this two-fold darkness, the Church, in her Office of the Dead, expresses the condition, and the prayer of the departed: "After darkness I hope for light again. The land of the dead is my home, and I have made my bed in darkness." "Deliver me, O Lord, from the ways of hell, who hast broken open the brazen gates and visited hell, and given light to behold Thee to those who were suffering the *punishments of darkness*."

In her own name she begs God to "grant to the soul of His departed servant the abode of refreshment, the enjoyment of rest and the *splendor of light*; to transport them to the realms of *light and peace*; to "assist them with His grace, that they may deserve to enjoy the *happiness of everlasting light*." "To them" (for whom a special memento is made) "and to all that rest in Christ, we beseech Thee, O Lord, grant the place of refreshment, of *light and of peace*." "May *eternal light* shine upon them with Thy saints forever, for Thou art good."

This two-fold darkness is kept in view in all those various practices of the Church and of the individual faithful of employing the candle at the death, the burial and after the burial of their departed brethren.

In the case of the dying, the Church

prescribes that during the administration of the sacraments and the prayers for the dying, the blessed candle should be kept lighted. This practice seems to be of apostolic origin, since St. Antonius informs us that the apostles observed it at the death of St. Martha. St. Ansgar, Bishop of Bremen, is related to have had three large wax candles manufactured, and by their light to have prayed daily for a happy death. Some rituals prescribe that the lighted candle should be placed in the hand of the dying person during the prayers that are recited for him. This touching ceremony indicates how the dark passage to death and eternity is lit up by the grace and love of Jesus Christ. The blessed candle is an emblem of the dying person's faith and hope in Christ, and of the charity in his heart which unites him and will keep him united with Christ throughout all eternity.

In some countries it is customary that, when brought to baptism, every child has its own candle, and this candle is religiously preserved unto the death of that person. Thus the same candle is used at the hour of death which was used in baptism. The deep significance of this custom will be seen from the words of the priest, when he gives the candle to the sponsors in baptism; "Receive the burning light and preserve irreproachable thy baptism, so that when the Lord cometh for the nuptial feast, thou mayest meet Him with all the saints in the Heavenly Court and obtain life everlasting." The hour of death is the hour of the nuptial feast, and with the same lighted taper and clothed with the same robe of sanctifying grace received in baptism, the soul awaits the coming of her Divine Spouse.

After death the wax taper is kept burning at the side of the corpse, and even in a natural sense it assists in dispelling the gloom and sadness that